Kurt Schwitters in Isolation – An Aesthetics of Resistance

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In 2007 I cycled from Clapham Junction to Highgate to meet Klaus Hinrichsen and his wife Margarete (Gretel) at their home in a part of the city long associated with émigré artists. The Hinrichsens had already settled in London prior to the war and this continued after their release from internment. Hinrichsen's account of internment has an established track record, documented in his own essay 'Visual Art Behind the Wire'.[1] I, like many others before, was warmly welcomed at the Hinrichsen's home. Prior to our meeting I had explained that I was born in the Isle of Man and had a long-standing interest in the work of Kurt Schwitters, and in particular the period of internment, which Hinrichsen had shared with Schwitters; both were detained in Hutchinson 'P' Camp, one of six in Douglas, and a total of eleven in the Isle of Man.

During the internment period, the authorities were aware of the importance of finding ways to keep the internees occupied as a way of counteracting the fears, anxieties and problems that their confinement might lead to. A predisposition to depression following their arrest and separation from friends and family was a traumatic symptom of this situation, and this study analyses the impact of Schwitters isolation and exile in the context of internment. The idea for a Hutchinson Camp Cultural Department was initially conceived in its organization by Bruno Siemens and others including Hinrichsen.[2] An Artists' Café was established in the camp, which was the venue for Schwitters' performances and readings, as well as the seat of planning, argument and debate for all the interned artists. Hinrichsen organized two art exhibitions in September and November 1940, both of which Schwitters participated in, and also later assumed an editorial role for the 'The Camp' journal. In Issue 8 of the journal, Michael Corvin writes the following in 'Life, Art and Future': 'There is a difference between strain and concentration, Undoubtedly, some in our midst feel nothing but strain in being interned and isolated; the others however have been able to concentrate, to become stronger in their personalities – and to create.'[3]

The Café was also in line with the longer-term vision of the authorities, who, as noted, needed ways to pre-occupy internees' minds with a regime driven by an itinerary of activities designed to stave off depressive episodes that might result should they not suitably utilize their time. The internees took ownership of this and Siemens duly enlisted the young art historian Hinrichsen to assist in what was a highly organized scheduling of activities. This led to a daily itinerary of public lectures, events and technical workshops. All of this was readily and enthusiastically supported by Captain O. H. (Hubert) Daniel, the Camp Commander. Daniel, who had previously been a stockbroker in the city of London, seized upon this initiative and christened it the Hutchinson University.[4] Captain Daniel sought to provide all the artists with materials, which they also received from the Artists' Refugee Association. Both Hinrichsen and another internee, Paul Jacobsthal, praise the supportive role he played in this respect.[5] Schwitters' absorption manifested itself in his use of everything available, and any available surface, substrate or wall surface, in a drive to counteract his own battle with depression and the recurring ill-health he suffered during this period.

Upon arrival at the Hinrichsen's Hillside Gardens home, I was invited into the living room, which seemed caught in time, though Dr Klaus Hinrichsen was very much in the present. He was full of enthusiasm in his willingness to communicate his experiences of this period, as he had done for many years, from the time since he was first introduced to Schwitters by the distinguished German author Richard Friedenthal. On the wall hung what is now a well-

known portrait of Hinrichsen, which was one of many portraits painted by Schwitters during a seventeen month period of internment. As one of the most public, first hand-authorities on internment, Hinrichsen had on many occasions described his admiration for Schwitters, though like the other internees, he was perhaps not yet aware of the longevity and significance of Schwitters' impact beyond his known association with Dada and his having seen Schwitters' work included in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich in 1937: 'I had never met Schwitters, but I imagined a Dadaist to look like an iconoclastic anarchist or a wide-eyed revolutionary. In reality this large heavily-built man of fifty-two years reminded me of Goethe, except that his mouth was soft and loose and strands of his greying hair were falling over his forehead, and when he spoke I recognized his precise and pedantic German accent as Hanoverian accent – a town not normally associated with artists.'[5]

Hinrichsen's account stands alongside that of fellow internee Fred Uhlman, both of whom revised their initial accounts later in life and in which each presents their memories of their friendship with Schwitters.[7] Both Schwitters and Ulhman present a pragmatic and largely positive perspective but importantly both highlight the injustice of their situation and its attendant depression. The testimonial of other internees from academia, such as Paul Jacobsthal, also contribute to this analysis of the impact of internment and exile: the loss of home, exile and isolation offer multiple perspectives in what they reveal.[8] Each of these accounts contributes to a narrative which is constructed from multiple perspectives and voices by which the impact of forced journeys, internment and exile for a generation of artists and refugees can be understood.[9]

Hinrichsen has explained that as an artist of the Dada era, Schwitters' literary output as a writer and 'performance artist' was already established. By this time, the longer term significance of Schwitters' *Merz* philosophy was not fully understood by those with whom he found himself interned. As Rudi Fuchs has observed, it was 'an art of impurity' – in a state of flux and devoid of mannered stylistic conventions, as Schwitters was indeed situated on the periphery of all movements. Schwitters was, however, respected and admired in the camp for his established literary legacy and his ability to recite his own works, some of which were already well-known throughout Germany in the 1920s, primarily 'An Anna Blume'. The acerbic description of Schwitters by Jacobsthal is really that of someone with no real understanding of the avant-garde, which was perhaps characteristic of a more general view of Schwitters held within the camp. Jacobsthal, however, is also openly critical of others too including Dr R. Eisler (amusingly also referred to as 'Professor Woolworth'), and in his criticism of lectures given by Eisler and other 'intellectual impostors', we catch an unsympathetic and uninformed glimpse of how Schwitters was regarded. This provides a further insight, which is indicative of Schwitters' position at the margins: 'He [Eisler] had his portrait done by an amateurish painter who in the years after the last war in the Munich Cabaret Simplicissimus had given recitals of dadaistic poems, a sort of infantile poetry, then much en vogue in Germany, a pendant to a certain kind of bogus painting.'

Jacobsthal goes on to describe the way in which Schwitters' portrait was the kind presented to a 'professor on their sixtieth or seventieth birthday and then hung in a hall or in an institute' and that the subject was painted in a gown borrowed from the daughter of the camp doctor.[10].Jacobsthal's account is also lighthearted, and in part itself a caricature, as he playfully debunks the status of almost all he comes into contact with. It is significant that he does cite his admiration for those he considers worthy of his praise. The artists he names include Fred Uhlman, Helmut Weissenborn, Siegfried Charoux and Georg Ehrlich, all of whom attended the lectures at House No. 24.[11] It is likely that Schwitters, although billeted next door at No.23, would not have attended these meetings, and not become better known to

Jacobsthal: 'Now I was living with men who had terribly suffered: they spoke rarely, but the more impressively of their experience in concentration camps: once far better off than I, they had lost everything and now with dignity led a life of privation in exile, eager to emigrate to America and to build up, if they could a new existence.'[12] Hutchinson Camp was not a concentration camp, as the term is understood in the Nazi context, although Warth Mills internment camp was rightly infamous for the inhumane conditions which were endured there. I gained a very real sense of this when Eva Shrewsbury, the daughter of former internee Walther Goldschmidt, described the psychological impact, ill health and hardship which her father had experienced during and as a consequence of internment. I contacted Shrewsbury following her appearance on the popular BBC television programme *The Antiques Roadshow*. In the programme, Shrewsbury met with the art dealer Peter Nahum and presented some drawings, clearly signed by Kurt Schwitters, alongside a small unsigned painting. It is supposed that the meeting between Schwitters and Walter Goldschmidt took place at either Warth Mills or on the Isle of Man, and it is likely that both were transported from one to the other at the same time, which would account for Schwitters passing these on to Goldschmidt. Notwithstanding the importance of provenance, there is no reason to suppose that the considered drawing and of what have the appearance of heart and clover motifs in this enigmatic painting is not from the hand of Schwitters.[13] (Fig.1)

Jacobsthal's summary of the academic and intellectual expertise and excellence that provided the basis for the lectures facilitated by the Cultural Department in the now burgeoning Hutchinson University is reflected in the following: 'Another series of Lectures was given by Professor Isaac, he treated his special subject, metabolism. Dr Forcheimer lectured on "Unemployment" and "Trade Cycle", Wellescz on "Genesis of an opera" and Modern Viennese Music", Dr Loening on "Technique of Printing", Dr Bersu has a 'Children's Class" in Prehistory […] Dr. v. Klemperer, formerly Director general of Schwartzkopff Ltd., a leading man in German heavy industry, told us something of his work and was awarded with the following diploma: Academia Manxiana doctorem Herbert de Klemperer qui arte fabri imbutus permultas variasque machinas vapore vel are motus construxit homines er res eximia mentis acumine […] Die II Mensis Septembris 1940. In Campo Hutchinson. Jacobsthal, Pfeiffer, Wellesz, Secretarii et Socii". The diploma was done by the graphic artist Dr Weissenborn, the affixed seal shew the arms of the Isle of Man, a triquetra with the motto "Quocumque jeceris ibi stabit" and a tailless Manx cat. […] But these evenings were a serious matter and prevented boredom and pointless talk.'[14] The distraction and informative absorption in these lectures was an incredibly important way of maintaining the internees' sense of identity as 'his Majesty's most loyal enemy aliens', whilst forward-looking in what these lectures encompassed in their scope and ambition. Rather than looking back, the discussions and workshops were aimed at preparing all concerned for life after internment, especially for the younger men. There was a School of Languages, and the Technical School provided the means of acquiring skills in a whole range of trades, including weaving, watch repairs, technical drawing, wireless and electrical engineering.[15]

Many of the refugees lost or were stripped of their belongings en route. Schwitters certainly arrived in the camp penniless and set about painting portraits in order to profit from their sale.[16] There is no doubt that this activity provided a distraction from the conditions of internment and as recounted to Raoul Hausmann, they were definitely not 'Merz'. Schwitters was a serious painter and the landscapes painted in Norway have been critically evaluated by the artist Per Kirkeby in his excellent essay 'The Tyranny of Style' (1995), while those painted later in Cumbria were a serious strand of practice for Schwitters. At the same time as working on portraits of his fellow internees, Schwitters also executed a series of line drawings of the same subjects alongside sensitive and intimate studies of flowers. Other Norwegian

scenes and portraits were painted from memory, including those of his wife Helma, and Esther (his son Ernst's first wife). Another series of drawings and small topographic paintings depict scenic views through to the horizon, as well as the hills in the distance over the rooftops of Douglas from a dormer window at the top of one of the houses in Hutchinson Square. Schwitters was permitted by Captain Daniel to work from a house just outside the boundary of the camp. The best of these works are more redolent of the kind of abstraction and painterly facture found in the most vital of the Norwegian landscapes, in particular *Scenery from Douglas 1* (1941), (Fig.2). These paintings also embody a sense of conceptual longing as they look towards the sea, obscured by the rooftops of Douglas over which Schwitters glimpsed the distant horizon. Hermann Fechenbach and Helmuth Weissenborn also depicted the same view, but in a more graphic and illustrative way, in their prints; the view from the elevated aspect of the Hutchinson Square Gardens was an important motif. For all, the distance to the horizon presents a paradox, as it represented more than a nostalgic longing for home or a future release; it was also a constant reminder of their separation and the air raid bombing of Liverpool, which lit up the night sky beyond.

In his fellow-artists Schwitters had a literally captive, ready and appreciative audience, as well as the wider collective of other camp internees, who despite their respect for Schwitters, regarded what they understood as his former Dadaist status as being a redundant one in the context of war. This too was a misunderstanding — a misconception of the significance of Dada; it had been a response to the cataclysm, catastrophe and destruction of the First World War, out of which Dada emerged as a social and politically subversive aesthetic. In dismantling the conventions of art, Dada and Merz were understood by some as an empty formal gesture that was no longer appropriate to the situation in which these artists now found themselves. Hinrichsen has described the discussions which emerged about 'the role of the art in war time'.[17]:

> Schwitters then and in a later letter to the *Kulturbund*, the Free German League of Culture, adamantly maintained that an artist's only obligation was towards art and not to accept any other message or programme. "Art is unpolitical" or Art is non-political, was almost as radical as Karl Scheffler's "L'art pour l'art". At that time we thought that as a visual artist Schwitters had lost his way, but all of us loved and admired his literary work, the boundless inventiveness, the relentless logic, the rhythm of his poems and the sheer beauty of the reciting voice.[17]

The work of other interned artists was rooted in an Expressionist moment and a more conventional but emotive figuration. Some notable exceptions can be found in the graphic work of Weissenborn, Fechenbach, Paul Hamann, Ernst Müller-Blensdorf, and Eric Kahn, whom Hinrichsen went on to study for his doctoral thesis. William Feaver, in his review of Camden Arts Centre's survey exhibition *Exile Art in Great Britain 1933 – 45,* admits not being 'strong on Schwitters, nor on other celebrated emigré artists'. He describes the work of those included as at best 'reflecting a makeshift stoicism', which perhaps not intentionally, but surely unfairly, describes the subject matter of the kind of work to which he refers. Nonetheless, the notion of stoicism in a philosophical sense, considered in this context, is a useful construct within which to situate the work of Schwitters and others. It involves an analysis of the works as a ways of coping with pain, illness, anxiety and loss as a form of resilience around which the following concepts can be in traduced, which relate to the notion of a dichotomy of control. This refers to the ability to make decisions or determine one's destiny where the ability to do so is restrained or suppressed. If instead the subject internalizes their position as a form of resistance when faced with circumstances, which otherwise constrain their thought, action and movement, whether physically or psychologically — in the

mind. Anthony Grenville has discussed the notion of *innere emigration*, a controversial concept, which Frank Thiess advanced as a counterpoint to Thomas Mann's wartime condemnation, in BBC German language radio broadcasts and writing, where he stated that any writing published within Germany whilst Hitler was in power carry 'a stench of blood and shame'. These ideas cannot be explored in full here but are crystallized around the situatedness of a double-bind, loss of home and exile, which represents the impossibility of returning to a former home and the uncertainty of settling into a future.

Schwitters' different modes of making are driven by absorption and distraction, as well as the financial income derived from portrait painting and drawings, and conversely the modality located in use of materials and forms found in the collage and assemblage works. In this distinction, the dichotomy is one defined by what was deemed acceptable and appropriate by his fellow internees, at the same time as commanding the attention of an audience and responding to their appetite, and delight in specific strands of his work on different levels. On the one hand he met a demand for portrait painting, yet the performances fulfilled another need, as a collective form of resistance. Hinrichsen told me that Schwitters kept the collage and assemblage works hidden from view, as they formed part of a deeply personal and what was during internment an hermetic practice. The modal value of these works suggests another scale of value, which following Werner Schmalenbach's analysis of Schwitters processes of *formung* and *entformung*, first outlined by Schwitters in *Merz 1 – Holland Dada* in 1923, which are dematerialised (*entmaterialisiert*) in their use of 'baser materials', as Sarah Wilson described them. Many other works of this kind were likely lost in the fire which swept through Schwitters studio, as told to Helma in a letter dated January 1940. There are extant examples of these works, which depend on a baseline use of a handful of materials. *Film Spool with Wire* (Fig. 3) is one of the most febrile of works in this sense in its collection and assembly of the most abject materials which are reconfigured in a sensitive and poetic way.[18] Other works of this kind including *Untitled (Brown and Green)* (1940), in their minimal configuration of forms and materials, embody a psychic dislocation in their collection, use and transformation of materials, which is close to a Duchampian 'snapshot'. *Untitled (Very Dark Picture)* of 1940, is interesting as it is assembled on the reverse side of a landscape painting made in Norway, which probably travelled with Schwitters to the camp. Many of the works made during internment were later revisited and reworked after Schwitters moved to London and then the Lake District, such as *Fredlyst with Yellow Artificial Bone*. The *Catalogue Raisonné* dates for this work are as follows: 1940-41, 1945 and 1947, with each year an indication of its subsequent reworking.

The contemporary accounts reveal the different facets which have come to define Schwitters' presence in Hutchinson, backgrounded by the sense of isolation and the susceptibility to depressive episodes to which the majority of the internees were vulnerable. The fervor and pitch at which the schedule of lectures and workshops were conducted functioned as a bulwark against the injustice of the situation. The highly organized nature of these activities was also one charged with a feverish 'nervousness'. All of this was set against the very real fear of German invasion, given the island's geographical location in the middle of the Irish Sea and in particular its proximity to Ireland, which was neutral, but subject to myths of German U-Boats deployed off the west coast of Ireland. Hinrichsen recalled that the internees had agreed that they would commit suicide rather than attempt escape, such was their sense of futility in their isolation.

In many of the letters written from internment to his wife, his son Ernst and Ernst's wife Esther, Schwitters sought to reassure his family that he was content and comfortable. In other instances, the letters actually reveal the extent of his hardship and anxieties with regard to

bouts of poor health. The impact of war and internment and Schwitters' mindset are revealed in particular in the correspondence with his wife Helma, in which, dependent on his mood, he writes in varying ways that poignantly reveal the physical and psychological impact of internment on his health and well-being. In a heartfelt and moving letter to Helma Schwitters he writes the following, which offers an alternate view of the sometimes 'rose-coloured' description he gave of camp life and internment in other letters:

'I am still here and long for you and mother. Once before we had a long waiting time – when we were engaged. But that wait came to an end and we lived through decades of happiness and "just now I am painting your portrait. I can paint you from memory, but you are twenty years younger. And I drew a heart on a window pane with white chalk. This heart is our future, Helma and I. At night I hold conversations and you appear to answer. In spite of war and separation we belong to each other, forever and all eternity.' 'I cannot agree that I should pray. I cannot see any point as God has different concerns. I retreat more and more from the rules of the Church, but I am still religious. And finally: 'Christmas – and I am a prisoner. It is a trial. I went to our church, unable to believe in man's love for his fellow man. This cruel war destroys all my beliefs, except the one in myself. And in you, mother and the children.'[19]

A poetic, poignant and pertinent letter that reveals the deeper thoughts and feelings which preoccupied Schwitters at this time, which lay bare the sense of calamity and the consequences of war, separation, and a displaced sense of faith and belonging, but also fortitude.

The different facets of Schwitters' persona and practice, which have been repeatedly recounted and which have become synonymous with Schwitters internment, have in turn also been reduced to the realm of anecdote. These stories have created the impression of a dignified but sometimes awkward persona — a caricature of the avant-garde artist in exile working in an attic, which indeed he did. Alternatively, they should be understood for the complexity of what they reveal, if they are construed as the stoic coping mechanisms, which in part they undoubtedly were. Whether this was Schwitters' preference for wearing his boots unlaced and without socks, or his sense of interiority in sleeping under, rather than in a bed: the latter may have been a practical one, in terms of avoiding the humiliation of having to share a bed with other internees, where four were often billeted to a room. Then there was his frantic but very profitable portrait output, alongside the furtive as well as public activity of collecting discarded materials and rubbish. In addition, the habitual but very serious process of making: assembling and collaging, alongside carving numerous sculptural forms, all of which have come to define the hybrid approaches and multiple forms, which embody *Merz* and its identity as an autonomous art form.[20] Schwitters inhabited the dwelling spaces of the pre-war boarding houses he lived in in the same way he had previously constructed an environment, which at each stage, was a step removed from the Hanover *Merzbau*, whilst outside he traversed the exterior and terraced, garden space of Hutchinson Camp as an outsider, delimited as this space was in its barbed wire enclosure. (Fig.4).

In this respect, Jacobsthal's testimony provides a valuable insight into the impact of internment, despite his abrasive dismissal of Schwitters. His overview of the conditions and their effects are significant for what they lend to this discussion: 'Confinement is more than the loss of freedom in the space that the sense of movement is narrowed. I personally have never suffered from the barbed were as others did and Uhlman's vision of death, barbed wire and crucifixion, admirable as they were, expressed a feeling strange to me [...] Confinement means a break in the continuity of existence, an interruption of the normal flux of life, it causes a trauma: the natural relation and proportional importance of past, present and future

become distorted. Suddenly through the repression of the present the past creeps up, assuming gigantic dimensions and occupying a proportionally large field of conscious life.'

Jacobsthal goes on to describe the limbo of their 'confinement' where the duration of their being held captive on an island in the middle of the Irish Sea was unknown in terms of their release; there was also the possibility that they might be deported to Canada, a fate which befell other refugees. The internees actively campaigned for their release as another outlet for their frustration and rightful indignation at having been interned, as well as a practical one in ensuring their release and the eventual turn in public opinion which followed as they drew attention to their plight in the national press. They channelled their energies into the support networks based in London, which also included their writing to, and lobbying, politicians; this led to the tireless support of activist Eleanor Rathbone and the future Labour Party leader Michael Foot.

The 'loss of contact with the outside world' is also cited by Jacobsthal, who does claim that the internees had access to all the national daily newspapers, the *New Statesman* and *Picture Post* (although these may have been smuggled in, as this is contradicted elsewhere by Hinrichsen, for example). According to Jacobsthal the single thing which most 'embittered' the internees, aside from their having been interned at all (given that many had already been long established in Britain), was the interference with their post and correspondence. Letters were subject to the scrutiny of a censor based at the camp, and were limited to one letter per week, consisting of twenty-four lines, and on a special type of paper designed specifically for this purpose, with each taking from a fortnight to twenty days to arrive in Liverpool:

'In normal times people correspond about weather, food, the garden or the children or give instructions to their wives to pay or to not pay bills. Here were men whose very existence was at stake, whose sons were deported to Canada, who prepared for emigration, had to dissolve their businesses, had to carry on a regular ample correspondence with authorities and firms here and abroad, had to inform and consult with their families on these steps.'[21]

Hinrichsen also observes that the censorship and anxiety around the receipt of post was a source of great distress, as it inevitably carried with it news and uncertainty related to the likelihood of being released or not, as the case might be, or news of their families suffering during the air raid bombing of the Blitz. Conversely, not receiving any post at all was just as bad, and the worry of waiting for a letter to arrive led to the men being prone to *ennui* and despair. The sense of injustice was palpable, as those interned at Hutchinson were anti-fascist to a man, but the censorship of their mail and restricted communications in effect followed protocols for Prisoners of War. Jacobsthal describes this as follows: 'After July the atmosphere became worse and worse and the camp seethed with anger and excitement.' Here, the idea of 'excitement' should be interpreted as the tension and frustration that the internees did their best to hold at bay. The scrutiny and approval of their letters was handled by a former Port of London Authority intelligence officer, a German-speaking Norwegian named Captain Jorgensen, who acted as censor. Jorgensen, alongside Captain Daniel, was one of three officers and a sergeant-major with whom the internees had regular contact. At its perimeter the camp was guarded by regular soldiers, with access to the camp at two entry points.

In 1986, Monica Bohm-Duchen and Zuleika Dobson organized and co-curated the survey exhibition of refugee artists *Exile Art in Great Britain 1933 - 45* at the Camden Arts Centre. Bohm-Duchen defines the historic context of the exile artist, and then the first influx of academics and businessmen from Germany in the 1930s, which raised fears of 'uncontrolled

immigration' during a period of high unemployment amidst the rise of home-grown fascism with Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts. (By 1939, 20,000 refugees had arrived, along with 5000 children via the *Kindertransport,* and the number doubled at the outbreak of war.) Bohm-Duchen describes internment as 'a shameful episode' where for 'most refugees, the years between 1933 and 1945 were lived in a state of suspension, truly a state of exile'. Bohm-Duchen proposes that the reception which such artists as Schwitters, Heartfield and Kokoschka received in Britain was 'disconcertingly inhospitable' where the artistic and critical emphasis lay with the French school of painting rather than German Expressionism. Schwitters 'isolation' was compounded by his eventual relocation to the Lake District, a decision guided by his affinity with the landscape as well as being the best option for his health having suffered a stroke and then the the news of Helma's tragic death from cancer which followed. It was also a financial decision related to how Schwitters was able to continue to support his living in London once Ernst returned to Norway. Bohm-Duchen's contextualises the divide of those who emigrated to America, and those who were already established and remained in Britain. For those who were scattered elsewhere, Schwitters' late collage *Windswept* (1947) has been cited by Roger Cardinal as a metaphor for those artist contemporaries who alongside Schwitters were dispersed in exile and 'carried away on the hurricane of history'.

The frontispiece of Cardinal and Webster's comprehensive and enlightening study of Schwitters includes the 1940 assemblage *Symphony for a Poet,* which is an example of the more lyrical of the reductive works made during internment. The disparate elements include a piece of dark brown linoleum replete with the tacks, which have been retained as it has been lifted from the floor as found, and below it two pieces of lead (likely roof flashing). Balancing this on the opposite side are two large stone pebbles lower right, and an arrangement of small shells and a piece of glass; these act as punctuation points tracing a diagonal divide between the upper and lower space of the image area. A large seagull feather bisects the whole, and the surface of the sideboard panel on to which they are adhered is painted with a series of wave-like strokes in a mist, which backgrounds the assembled disjunction of the materials and their lyrical configuration. This assemblage is, though, an open one as its constituent elements are held in an unbounded tension in which they might suddenly be blown away or drift elsewhere.

In his essay 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals', Edward Said reflects upon the status of the exile, which in this context is applicable to the position adopted by many of those academics and intellectuals with whom Schwitters was interned. In Said's conception, it is the artistic freedom of the writer or artist that appertains to our understanding of Schwitters. Said discusses the distance from former homes and at the same time their proximity, in the sense that those connections have not yet been completely expunged or jettisoned: 'The exile therefore exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered with the old, beset with half involvements, and half detachments, nostalgia and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or secret outcast on the other.' Said situates his exile study in relation to post-war territorial upheaval, migration and displacement, all of which lay ahead of Schwitters. He is also concerned with 'the largely unaccommodated exiles' who instead represent 'volatility and instability' and who 'remain outside the mainstream, unaccommodated, uncoopted, resistant'. Said proposes the notion of a metaphorical exile as 'insiders and outsiders'; he distinguishes this from what is more readily identified with 'the social and political history of dislocation and migration'. He repositions this as one which in the 'metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled and unsettling others. You can't go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation.'[22]

Schwitters' most hermetic works – those which according to Hinrichsen he kept hidden from view — are testament to the need to maintain a way of working which was driven in its identity as *Merz*. In all, his practices embody the liminality, yet unconstrained multiplicity of a metaphysical *innere Emigration*. The sense of loss and isolation, manifest in that which could easily be lost to the realm of anecdote, are outweighed by one which interprets the significance of these events and actions for what they really reveal: an oscillation between what is *hidden* and what appears, is seen, known and heard.

In this, we remember the intense nature of the performances of his key works including 'An Anna Blume', the *Ursonate* and in particular *Leise,* reprised in English as *Silence* with its auto-destructive crescendo in the airborne collision and sonic reverberation in the shatter of a saucer and cup; or his wont to bark like dog from the window of his room late at night; or the obsessive collection of buckets of left-over porridge, which were a substitute for the unavailability of plaster, as he attempted to recreate the *Merzsaüle* situated at the heart of the Hannover *Merzbau* in the construction of three columns festooned with debris and collected material in his attic studio in Hutchinson.[23] In its reported decay, material crystallization of colour, odour and pathos — that is, a seemingly pathetic gesture subject to misunderstanding and ridicule — *the porridge sculpture* and other works, which should be properly considered as such, instead manifest what it is laid bare and at the same time embrace: 'the pleasures of exile, those different arrangements of living and eccentric angle of vison that it can sometimes afford, which enliven the intellectual's vocation without perhaps alleviating every last anxiety or feeling of bitter solitude.' In the midst of uncertainty, personal and collective isolation it is one which is also 'ironic, skeptical, even playful but not cynical'.[24]

The sense of injustice and hope simultaneously redeemed in the moment was not lost on those assembled, as they witnessed the wilfully destructive gesture of a precious cup and saucer being smashed to smithereens, the pieces of which could never be reassembled. According to Hinrichsen, Schwitters at first slowly rotated the cup upon its saucer in small circular movements, accompanied by the initial refrain and whisper of the word *Silence*; the increasing audibility of the singular utterance of the word, repeated over and over, accompanied the rotating movements of the cup and saucer, which began 'to sway and wobble dangerously', until the cup was suddenly 'tossed into the air and hit with the saucer; both fell on the floor smashed. The audience was stunned by the enormity of this deed – cups and saucers were prized possessions in the camp. The sheer audacity combined with the perversion of screaming the word 'Silence' suddenly released in all the refugees the pent up frustration of being interned, being treated as enemies, being victimised by officialdom – it was a cathartic experience.'[25] Once the audience had recovered from this subversive gesture, Schwitters went on to perform the *Ursonate*. This too, had a lasting impact on all the internees, who even after their release carried two themes from the *Scherzo* (*Lanke trr gll pii pii*, *Ooka*, *ooka*) with them as a call and response greeting as a sublimated code or address. It had marked a rite of passage in the ordeal they had had to endure, along with the anxiety and depression of being separated from family and friends which they continually resisted in their efforts during internment.

Ultimately this is where the significance of Schwitters' most vital and significant works and public performances are situated. At each step of the way Schwitters had always attempted to reconstruct his sense of place in the essence (*Eigengift*) and manifestation of *Merz*. This may have seemed out of step to those around him, but nevertheless his presence and being indelibly imprinted its mark in their psyche and memory. Collected together, these interludes

or interventions can be seen as dislocations in response to the notion of a 'dichotomy of control' which determined the internees' experience of confinement during their internment.

'Because the exile sees things in terms of both what has been left-behind and what is actual here and now, he or she has a double perspective, never seeing things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country.'[26] Tragically, Schwitters and his wife Helma were never reunited, as Helma died of cancer in 1944. Their house in Waldhausenstrasse, and with it the *Merzbau,* was bombed by the Allies in 1943. In the contingency which all material things held for Schwitters there was the added deprivation of exile; imbued by melancholy and loss, his works speak for the depression which was felt by all with whom he had been interned. The trajectory was nevertheless a forward movement rather than a return. Going home was no longer an option; the genius and origin of the Hannover *Merzbau*, remade and retraced in each manifestation of *Merz*, might ultimately have led elsewhere, but instead found a new but ultimately unresolved *denouement* in the Elterwater *Merz Barn*. As John Elderfield has commented, the 'inscrutability' of these works strengthens their understanding as they manifest a spatio-temporal continuum of past, present and future. As a unified whole, they are not the product of nostalgia or a past moment in the history of art, but instead face forward in their redemptive potentiality. They flare into view in their simultaneous appearance and disappearance and subsequent re-emergence in the vividness of their material presence as a redemptive projection of the future, and an aesthetics of resistance.

With thanks to Yvonne Cresswell and Manx National Heritage library staff at the Manx Museum in Douglas in the Isle of Man.

Notes

1. This essay was originally prepared for a special issue (*The Internment of Aliens in the Twentieth Century in Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 11, Frank Cass, London, 1992). As such it is a distillation of a number of talks, testimonies, interviews and writings (others followed) by Hinrichsen on the same subject, which have informed this essay. Other primary sources relating to internment include those of Paul Jacobsthal, Helmuth Weissenborn, Fritz Hallgarten and Peter Fleischmann (later Midgley), which can now be found in the oral history archives of the Imperial War Museum.

2. Hinrichsen Oral History: IWM 3989. 1978. Before the war, Siemens had designed and built the industrial town of Siemensstadt, built on a river-bounded area to the north of Berlin's Charlottenburg district, and had envisaged the redesign of the island with skyscrapers to replace boarding houses. Jacobsthal and others also imagined a new cultural landscape as a projection of their future rather than the futility of their return to a former life.

3. 'The Camp': Hutchinson Square Internment Camp Issues 1 - 13/14 including *The Camp Almanac* which was presented to Captain Daniel (MS27059). The collection of photocopied documents in the Manx Museum Library was made from the original copies of 'The Camp', which are held in the Imperial War Museum.

4. Hinrichsen (1978) observes how Daniel 'did an awful lot for artists from the very beginning' and Jacobsthal describes Daniel as follows: 'The very humane and sincere Commandant had the ideal of a "happy family" - his words.'

5. Hallgarten 1978. Hallgarten also provides this interesting perspective from a lecture by Rabbi Easchelbacher from Dusseldorf according to the Jewish saying *gamsi le tauvo*: 'There is always something good in everything which happens, to tell us it can't be so bad that you are interned there is some meaning in it. "If you look back" he said, "our uncles, or cousins, or whoever it was were the black sheep of the family, they were sent to America, they had to go away, and now they were the people for whose affadavits we wait in order to get to America – gamsi le tauvo.'"

6. Hinrichsen 1988b.

7. Upon our meeting Hinrichsen asked if I would present his paper at the 2004 Tate Britain conference *Kurt Schwitters in England* convened by the Littoral Arts Trust (Ian Hunter and Celia Larner). In Quayle 2004, I integrated Hinrichsen's account, based on Hinrichsen 1999b.

8. Paul Jacobsthal was removed from his post in Marburg by the Gestapo in the 1930s, sharing the fate of many other academics. He was appointed to Christ Church Oxford in 1937 as an expert on Greek vase painting and Celtic Archaeology. Jacobsthal also describes how Albert Einstein used his stipend to fund and support these appointments.

9. For this essay I have revisited my own formative PhD study (Chapter 6, University of the Arts London 2005) of Schwitters' relationship with place from an exile and artist's journey perspective. The study of Schwitters' collection and transformation of discarded materials which guided this research sat alongside that of Gustav Metzger and Jimmie Durham and artists using photography in America in the 1960/70s, including Ed Ruscha, Douglas Huebler and Bas Jan Ader. Its focus is on the material presence, psychic and aesthetic charge which

Schwitters' work embodies, and the foundations upon which these are grounded, and metaphorically and physically uprooted.

10. Jacobsthal, p.17.

11. Ibid. pp. 20-25. The boarding houses and private residences in Hutchinson Square were amongst forty requisitioned for internment. A House 'Father' or Captain was appointed for each. Approximately 12,000 men were in residence of 40-70 years of age and predominantly of Austrian rather than German extraction. 80% of the Jewish internees were from London's East End with a minority of Jewish refugees from Germany. The daily routine is outlined by Jacobsthal as follows: Breakfast 7 - 7.30 am. Roll-call: 8 am with House Father reporting to Sergeant Major and officers. Lunch 12.30 pm. Tea: 4 pm. Roll-call: 5.30 pm. 'Otherwise we were left to ourselves. It goes without saying there was much *Kultur*.'

12. Ibid., p. 17.

13. I first made contact with Eva Shrewsbury following the broadcast of this edition of the Antiques Road Show in 2004 and we subsequently spoke by telephone. Shrewsbury donated the drawings and painting to the Armitt Museum and Library in Ambleside, where they can be seen today.

14. Jacobsthal, p. 24.

15. Hinrichsen 1999b. The translations from the original correspondence in German (now in the Kurt Schwitters Archive, Hannover) are Hinrichsen's own.

16. Hinrichsen Oral History: IWM 3789. 1978 Hinrichsen describes how most had been permitted to leave Germany with only 10 marks. They were allowed to carry what belongings and furniture they could manage, but many lost their papers and valuables en route or in transit between camps.

17. Hinrichsen 1999b, p.7.

18. As part of their discussions related to the role of the artist and the perceived legacy of Dada in the midst of *Neue Sachlichkeit*; Hinrichsen and others overlooked the psychological impact of these works. In his criticism of Schwitters, Hinrichsen felt these works had 'no meaning for various other people' and the Dadaist gesture in the use of degraded materials was superseded by his 'enormous artistic taste' and the 'impeccable overall taste of the arrangement' (KH: 1978). Hinrichsen later admitted in conversation in July 2004 with the author that he and others, including Uhlman, didn't really understand what Schwitters was doing. I have included these comments, which are not a definitive reflection of how Hinrichsen felt, even later in hindsight, but they do represent Schwitters sense of marginalisation, where on other occasions Schwitters inspired his fellow internees with the intensity of his recitals, performances and presence.

19. Hinrichsen 1999b, p.7. The translation of Schwitters' letters to his wife Helma Schwitters is drawn from the translation from German in the text that Dr Hinrchsen provided me with as the basis for my talk; this integrated his account of internment into my own analysis for the 2004 Tate conference.

20. In 2009 I organized the University of Chester hosted conference *The Art of Appropriation and Kurt Schwitters in England: Authenticity – Reproduction – Simulation* (July 10 - 11). Keynote speakers at this event were as follows: Roger Cardinal, John Stezaker, David Evans, and Megan Luke, whose paper *Sculpture for the Hand – Kurt Schwitters in England* analysed the small sculptures and objects made during and following internment. This material informed the research and writing of Luke's *Kurt Schwitters; Space Image Exile* (2014). The publication of a selection of the 2009 conference papers is forthcoming.

21. Jacobsthal, p. 30.

22. Said 1993, pp.115-17.

23. Hinrichsen 1988. Hinrichsen described his astonishment and realisation as to finding out what happened to the materials that he had witnessed Schwitters pick up from the ground and collect; he hadn't at first understood his motive.

24. Said 1993, p.123

25. Hinrichsen 1988.

26. Said 1993, pp.121-22.

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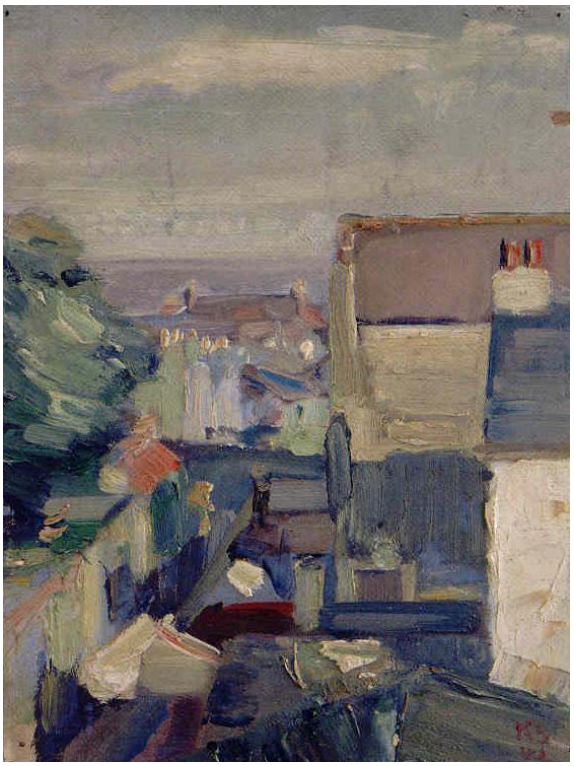
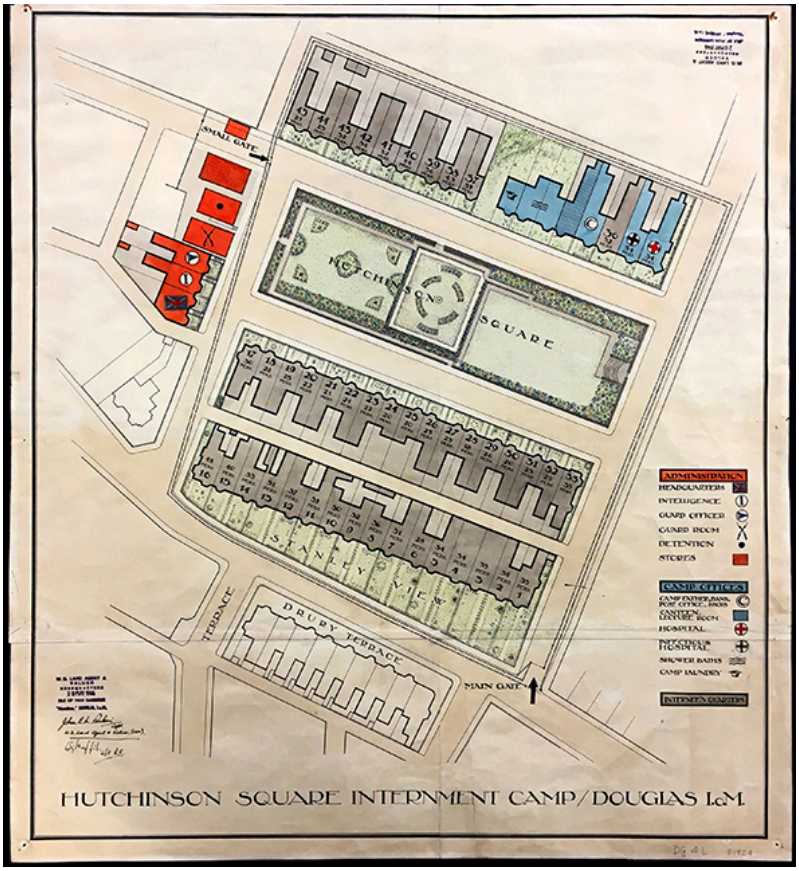
Illustrations

1. Kurt Schwitters?, *Untitled (Abstract)*. Oil on asbestos tile, 15.4 x 14.5 cm. Armitt Museum and Library, Ambleside. KS Catalogue Raisonné A20.

2. Kurt Schwitters, *Untitled (Merz Picture with Film Spool and Wire),* 1937/40, 19.8 x 14.8 cm. Stiftung Insel Hombroich, Neuss. KS Catalogue Raisonné 2112.



3. Kurt Schwitters*, Scenery from Douglas* (1), 1941. Oil and wax tempura on plywood, 32.7 x 24.9 cm. KS Catalogue Raisonné 2787.



4. *Hutchinson Square Internment Camp/Douglas, Isle of Man, 1946.* Plan P.1824 (DG 4 L) Reproduced by kind permission of Manx National Heritage.